Funding for Homeless Assistance Grants: The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) received a $141 million increase in Homeless Assistance Grants (HAG) in FY20, raising total funding to almost $2.8 billion. For FY21, the Alliance is seeking a 10% increase in HAG funding. Permanent Supportive Housing isn’t getting any cheaper, rents for Rapid Re-Housing continue to increase, and the nation’s affordable housing crisis is driving more low-income Americans into homelessness. The Alliance is surveying Continuums of Care (CoCs) to identify how they’d use a 10% increase to enhance homelessness services in their communities. If your CoC has not submitted a response, please take the time to fill out a survey so we can use your answers to persuade Congressional lawmakers.

Housing First: The Alliance supports efforts by Congressional lawmakers to re-affirm Housing First in the CoC Notice of Funding Availability (NoFA) process. House and Senate funders for HUD included language in their FY20 bill which negated anti-Housing First provisions in the 2019 NoFA. It is expected that the 2020 NoFA will include anti-Housing First provisions, thus necessitating additional legislative intervention.

Major Reforms to Homelessness and Housing Programs: Representatives and Senators have introduced many fine bills that would provide systemic improvements to the nation’s homelessness and housing programs. However, two bills, both of them introduced by House Financial Services Committee Chairwoman Maxine Waters (D-CA), should be singled out:

1. The Ending Homelessness Act (H.R. 1856) provides a comprehensive plan to ensure that every person experiencing homelessness in America has a place to call home. The bill would appropriate $13.3 billion in mandatory emergency relief funding over 5 years to several critical federal housing programs and initiatives, providing the resources that these programs need to effectively address the homelessness crisis in America. If enacted, this bill is estimated to fund the creation of 410,000 new units of housing for people experiencing homelessness.
2. The **Housing is Infrastructure Act (H.R. 5187)** would make the following investments into the nation’s housing infrastructure: $70 billion to fully address the public housing capital backlog; $1 billion to fully fund the backlog of capital needs for the Section 515 and 514 rural housing stock; $5 billion for the Housing Trust Fund to support the creation of hundreds of thousands of new units of housing that would be affordable to the lowest income households; $100 million to help low income elderly households in rural areas age in place; $1 billion for the Native American Housing Block Grant Program to address substandard housing conditions on tribal lands; $10 billion for a Community Development Block Grant set-aside to incentivize states and cities to eliminate impact fees and responsibly streamline the process for development of affordable housing; and $5 billion for the HOME Investment Partnership Program to fund affordable housing activities such as building, buying, and rehabilitating affordable homes for low-income people; $2.5 billion for the Supporting Housing for Elderly (Section 202 Program); $2.5 billion for Supportive Housing for persons with disabilities (811 Program); and $2.5 billion to the Capital Magnet Fund for competitive grants to Community Development Financial Institutions to finance affordable housing and community revitalization efforts.

It remains to be seen if the legislation will be moved to the floor for consideration by the entire House. H.R. 1856 has already been approved by Chairwoman Waters’ committee—along partisan lines—and H.R. 5187 has been considered at committee hearings. Both bills have been introduced in the Senate as S. 2613 and S. 2951, respectively, but the Banking Committee has not formally considered the legislation.

**Opportunity Starts at Home Bills for Flexible Funding and Housing Vouchers:** NAEH is a proud member of Opportunity Starts at Home (OSAH), a long-term campaign to meet the rental housing needs of the nation’s low-income people. OSAH has developed two important bills which the Alliance strongly supports:

1. The **Eviction Crisis Act (S. 3030)**, introduced with bipartisan support, would, among other things, establish a dedicated federal funding stream for homelessness prevention which would be used for the provision of nominal sums of financial assistance to low-income households experiencing housing instability or in danger of eviction.
2. The Family Stability and Opportunity Vouchers Act (S. 3083), also introduced with bipartisan support, would establish 500,000 new Housing Choice Vouchers over the next five years for families that are experiencing homelessness or housing instability, or wish to live in areas with quality schools and other opportunities for healthy development.

**Homelessness, Housing, and Health Care:** NAEH endorses three bills which promote better health care:

1. The **Fighting Homelessness with Services and Housing Act (S. 923, H.R. 1978)** would provide health care services for those experiencing homelessness through the establishment of a grant program in the Health Resources Services Administration of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The bill has not yet been taken up by the committees of jurisdiction.

2. The **Services for Ending Long-Term Homelessness Act (H.R. 3272)** would provide those experiencing chronic homelessness with permanent supportive housing as well as health care through the establishment of a grant program in the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration of HHS. The bill has not yet been taken up by the committee of jurisdiction.

3. The **Social Determinants Accelerator Act (H.R. 4004, S. 2986)** would establish grants for states to take into account factors that contribute to our health, i.e., social determinants of health, including housing, education, income, neighborhood, personal health practices, genetic endowment, physical environment, etc., in the development and implementation of health care policy, which should lead to better and less expensive health care. Both the House and Senate versions of the bill were introduced with bipartisan support; however, no action has been taken by the committees of jurisdiction.

**Equal Access to Shelters:** The Alliance supports legislation (H.R. 3018, S. 2007) that would forbid the replacement of the Equal Access Rule, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity in HUD programs, with the Administration’s draft alternative. That draft alternative would allow shelter programs to consider “privacy, safety, practical concerns, and religious beliefs” in making determinations of access on the basis of gender identity. The House bill was approved by the Financial Services Committee by a partisan vote, and it could be sent to the floor later this year. The Senate bill has not been taken up by the Banking Committee.
**Veteran Homelessness Programs:** The Alliance supports funding increases for the veteran homelessness programs—GPD, HUD-VASH (including Tribal HUD-VASH), and particularly SSVF, which needs new funding to pay for its promising Shallow Subsidy initiative and fulfill new requirements to serve women veterans. With respect to HUD-VASH, Congress should work with VA to induce medical centers to staff up their caseworkers; provide additional funding for recruitment and retention of caseworkers; and allow for outsourcing of casework, particularly housing navigation.

The Alliance strongly supports legislation to expand eligibility for HUD-VASH benefits to veterans subjected to other-than-honorable (OTH) discharges. Veterans discharged OTH are already eligible for the other two veteran homelessness programs. The House bill (H.R. 2398) was passed with minimal opposition, while the Senate bill (S. 2061), introduced with bipartisan support, awaits action by the Banking Committee.

**Youth Homelessness Programs:** The Alliance endorses the Fostering Stable Housing Opportunities Act (H.R. 4300, S. 2803), which would offer three-year Family Unification Program vouchers to all young people who are between the ages of 18 and 24 leaving foster care and at risk of homelessness—with the opportunity to extend those vouchers by two years (for a total of five years) by voluntarily participating in self-sufficiency activities. The House bill passed without opposition. The Senate bill was favorably assessed by Republicans and Democrats alike at a Banking Committee hearing. The Alliance also endorses a reauthorization of the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act, provided the legislation includes a nondiscrimination provision which reflects the policies currently set in program regulations.

**Tribal Homelessness:** The Alliance supports legislation that would allow Indian Tribes and tribally designated housing entities to apply for, receive, and administer grants and subgrants under HUD’s CoC program. The House bill (H.R. 4029) was passed without opposition, but the Banking Committee has yet to take action on the Senate bill.

**Helping Ex-Offenders Avoid Homelessness:** The Alliance supports a pair of bills to make it easier for the justice-involved to escape homelessness.

1. **Fair Chance at Housing Act (H.R. 3685 and S. 2076)** would reform the screening and eviction policies for federal housing assistance in order to provide fair access to federally-subsidized housing for ex-offenders. The bills have not yet been considered by the committees of jurisdiction.
2. **Humane Correctional Act (H.R. 4141 and S. 2305)** would repeal the so-called Medicaid Inmate Exclusion, which strips health coverage from Medicaid enrollees who are involved in the criminal justice system, decreasing access to care and make it more likely they will be homeless upon reentry. The bills have not yet been considered by the committees of jurisdiction.

**Re-defining “Homelessness:”** HUD’s programs are insufficiently resourced to care for the almost 600,000 people defined as experiencing homelessness, either living on the streets or in shelters. Consequently, the Alliance must oppose legislation that would change the definition of “homelessness” to include the 4.4 million unstably-housed Americans, i.e., those living doubled-up with friends and families, thus making them eligible for HUD’s homelessness programs. People living doubled-up deserve real help—particularly more vouchers and public housing. It is wrong to pit low-income, doubled up families against America’s poorest families, those experiencing homelessness, for the same limited resources, particularly in a budget which last year included $1.4 trillion in discretionary spending.

**HEALS Act (H.R. 5184, S. 1624):** The Alliance opposes this legislation because it would prevent HUD from rewarding effective and efficient homelessness programs, which poorly serves both people experiencing homelessness as well as taxpayers. The HEALS Act is also included in one of the leading Senate versions of the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) (S. 2920). Neither the House-passed VAWA reauthorization nor the other leading Senate version of VAWA reauthorization (S. 2843) include the HEALS Act, and both measures are supported by the Alliance.